2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

back to the forest and was never again to be allowed to see him or any of his family, but would be well cared for.

On attempting to find this Mbuti Chief, I discovered that he was in fact just an elderly hunter, and that the girl was his granddaughter. The local Mbuti denied any system of chieftainship, but said that they always appointed one person to deal with the villagers, as in this instance. Both they and the villagers claimed that the legitimate heirs to the chieftainship had to be born of either one of these two formal unions, and that in fact the Chief would sleep again with one or the other girl until she bore him at least two boys. They also said that obviously he would not sleep again with his sister (he himself seemed somewhat disgusted at the recollection of his first night as Chief), and so it would be his Mbuti wife who would provide the tribe with its heir.

There are also firstfruit offerings to the Mbuti in this area, and the same elements of respect and of economic unbalance extend right out of the forest into Ruanda and Burundi, even to the Twa in their relationship with the Tussi. For our present purposes, however, the two situations are not strictly comparable.

But however the villagers might rationalize the economic advantages that accrue to the Mbuti, they do not accept the situation entirely passively. They attempt to create some mechanism by which they can exert authority over the Mbuti and compel them to their service. It is quite evident that if the powerful tribal chiefs backed by armed police are unable to pursue the Mbuti in the forest (even the Belgian administration did not attempt to extend their authority this far), the lesser chiefs are going to be that much more incapable of asserting direct political control. Chiefs such as Kachui, Hamadi, Lupao and Nakubai did not even enter disputes concerning Mbuti in their tribunal records, preferring to deal with such cases "directly." I have witnessed a number of such cases, most of them involving alleged theft, or failure to reciprocate in the exchange of food. The Mbuti claim is invariably that the land is his (even when the charge is for theft of property, not of food), and the villager claim is, equally invariably, that the Mbuti are servants of the villagers, bound to them by indissoluble bonds of heredity and by the fact that the villagers "rescued" the Mbuti from the forest. To this the Mbuti may reply that they "dug" the villagers from a hole in the ground and taught them "how to see and smell and hear and talk." If the case involves food, each side claims original ownership of the plantain

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4 •
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

P
C
648
691 •
423
186

tree and the Mbuti alleges that the villager stole the stem by trickery, leaving him only the leaves, so that the villager was able to replant the trees and grow more, but when the Mbuti planted the leaves they just withered and died.[8] It is seldom that the Mbuti deny possession of the stolen goods; what they deny is the act of stealing. But whatever the fact, and however judgment is given, the essential point is that there is no mechanism for enforcing that judgment. Judgment being given by a villager is in my experience without exception against the Mbuti, and orders restitution of the property, or service in lieu. If the Mbuti complies, however, it is merely because in his own estimation it is expedient to do so. If he feels that he has exhausted the goodwill of the injured villager he will simply leave, and thenceforth deal with another villager. If any attempt is made to inflict physical punishment on an Mbuti, or to imprison him, then the whole band will initiate reprisal raids on the plantations of the individual who brought the complaint. This seldom happens, because villagers seek other means for achieving some measure of control over the Mbuti, and it is with those that we shall now concern ourselves.

[8] See Appendix I: "The Legend of the Mbuti Plantation."